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**Letter dated 24 February 2004 from the Permanent Representative of Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General**

I have the honour to draw your attention to the statement on the process of verification and validation of signatures in Venezuela, issued on 23 February 2004 by the Presidency on behalf of the European Union (see annex).

I should be grateful if the text of the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Richard **Ryan**
Permanent Representative of Ireland to the United Nations

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## Annex to the letter dated 24 February 2004 from the Permanent Representative of Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

[Original: English, French and Spanish]

## Statement on the process of verification and validation of signatures in Venezuela issued on 23 February 2004 by the Presidency on behalf of the European Union

The European Union reaffirms its commitment to the democratic development of Venezuela and reiterates the importance of fully implementing the political agreement signed on 29 May 2003 by the Government and the opposition Coordinadora Democrática, in line with resolution 833 of the Organization of American States (OAS), which calls for a constitutional, democratic, peaceful and electoral solution to the crisis in Venezuela.

The European Union underlines the importance of prompt and effective compliance by the National Electoral Council (Consejo Nacional Electoral — CNE) with its institutional duties. In this respect, the European Union is concerned at the delay in the process of verification and validation of signatures to determine the possibility of recall referenda. It welcomes the announcement by CNE of its intention to conclude the process at the latest by 28 February, and calls on CNE to expedite the definitive decision on the holding of the referenda.

In view of the role of OAS in Venezuela and the cooperation it has established with CNE in the verification process, the European Union fully supports the recommendations contained in the joint statement by OAS and the Carter Center of 13 February 2004. It agrees, in particular, with the criteria of international observation, namely, the principle of transparency in control mechanisms against possible fraud, as well as the inalienable right of citizen participation that must be guaranteed by the electoral authority. The European Union believes that the will of the signatories must be respected. Although the European Union recognizes that there may have been some instances of fraud, CNE should apply technical regulations in a way which respects the rights of citizens who have signed petitions in good faith.

The European Union calls on all parties to continue to implement the agreement of 29 May 2003 in a climate of mutual respect, tolerance and restraint, and to fully abide by the Declaration against Violence and for Peace and Democracy of 18 February 2003, within the framework of the rule of law and democratic principles.

The acceding countries Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia, the candidate countries Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey, the countries of the stabilization and association process and potential candidates Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia and Montenegro and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and the EFTA countries Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway, members of the European Economic Area, align themselves with this statement.